

2015

Synopsis

GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX

ARMED CONFLICT AND THE CHALLENGE OF HUNGER

IFPRI issue brief
October 2015

88



The 2015 Global Hunger Index (GHI) report—the tenth in an annual series—presents a multidimensional measure of national, regional, and global hunger. It shows that the world has made progress in reducing hunger since 2000, but still has a long way to go, with levels of hunger still serious or alarming in 52 countries.

The theme of this year’s report is armed conflict and the challenge of hunger. Conflict and hunger are closely associated. Indeed, conflict is the main cause of persistent severe hunger, and countries with the lowest levels of food security are often engaged in or recently emerged from war. Although conflict and hunger often travel hand in hand, history has shown that hunger need not result from conflict.

THE GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX

This report’s GHI scores are based on a revised and improved formula that replaces the child underweight indicator of previous years with child stunting and child wasting and standardizes the component indicators to balance their contribution to the overall index and to changes in GHI scores over time. These changes reflect the current thinking in nutrition measurement and index construction.

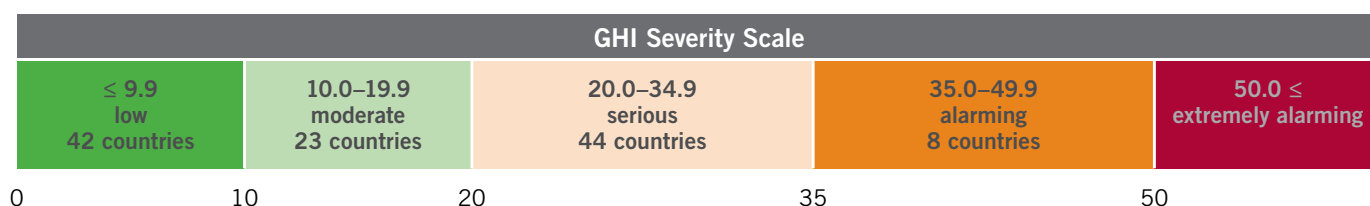
The 2015 GHI combines four component indicators into one index:

- ▶ The proportion of people who are undernourished;
- ▶ The proportion of children under age five who suffer from wasting (low weight for height, reflecting acute undernutrition);
- ▶ The proportion of children under age five who suffer from stunting (low height for age, reflecting chronic undernutrition); and
- ▶ The mortality rate of children under age five.

Data on the indicators come from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, the World Bank, Demographic and Health Surveys, the United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN IGME), and International Food Policy Research Institute estimates. The 2015 GHI is calculated for 117 countries for which data are available and reflects data and projections from 2010 to 2016.

The GHI ranks countries on a 100-point scale, with 0 being the best score (no hunger) and 100 being the worst, although neither of these extremes is reached in practice. Values less than 10.0 reflect low hunger, values from 10.0 to 19.9 reflect moderate hunger, values from 20.0 to 34.9 indicate serious hunger, values from 35.0 to 49.9 are alarming, and values of 50.0 or more are extremely alarming (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1 NUMBER OF COUNTRIES BY HUNGER LEVEL



Note: Currently no countries fall in the extremely alarming category. Unfortunately up-to-date data are lacking for several countries, including Burundi, Comoros, and Eritrea, which appeared in that category in at least one of the past two GHI reports.

RANKING AND TRENDS

The number of hungry people in the world remains unacceptably high. About 795 million people are chronically undernourished, while more than one in four children are stunted and 9 percent of children suffer from wasting.

That said, the GHI shows some progress in the fight against hunger (Figure 2). The 2015 GHI for the developing world fell by 27 percent from the 2000 GHI, from a score of 29.9 to 21.7. The global averages mask dramatic differences among regions and countries. Africa south of the Sahara and South Asia have the highest 2015 GHI scores, at 32.2 and 29.4 respectively, reflecting serious levels of hunger. In contrast, the GHI scores for East and Southeast Asia, Near East and North Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States range between 13.2 and 8.0, and represent moderate or low levels of hunger.

Signs of Progress

Between the 2000 GHI and the 2015 GHI, 17 countries made remarkable progress, reducing their GHI scores by 50 percent or more. Sixty-eight countries made considerable progress with scores that dropped by between 25 percent and 49.9 percent, and 28 countries decreased their GHI scores by less than 25 percent. Despite this progress, 52 countries still suffer from serious or alarming levels of hunger.

This year's report does not include GHI scores for several countries that had very high (alarming or extremely alarming) GHI scores in the 2014 report, including Burundi, Comoros,

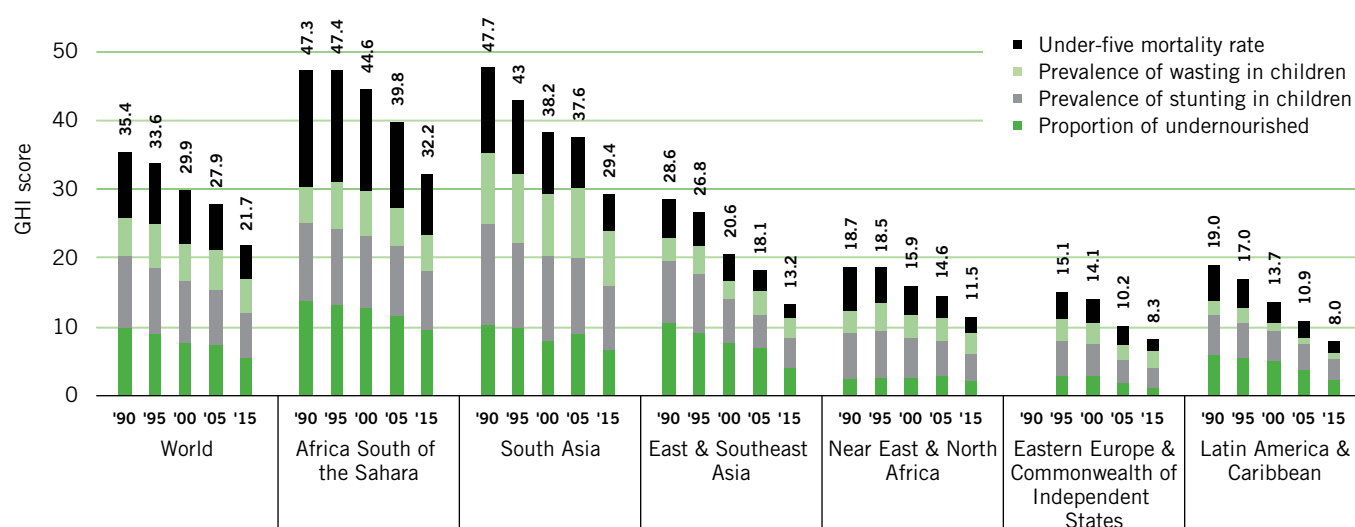
Eritrea, South Sudan, and Sudan, because current data on undernourishment were not available.¹ In addition, while the Democratic Republic of the Congo had the highest GHI score of all countries in the 2011 GHI report, it has not been possible to calculate a GHI score for the country since 2011 due to missing data. Although the lack of data obscures their hunger levels, the situations in these countries still merit great concern and must not be forgotten.

Of the countries that achieved the 10 biggest percentage reductions in GHI scores from the 2000 GHI to the 2015 GHI, three are in South America (Brazil, Peru, and Venezuela), one is in Asia (Mongolia), four are former Soviet republics (Azerbaijan, Kyrgyz Republic, Latvia, and Ukraine), and two are former Yugoslav republics (Bosnia and Herzegovina plus Croatia). The GHI scores for each of these countries have declined significantly—between 53 and 70 percent since 2000.

Brazil reduced its 2000 GHI score by roughly two-thirds. Its impressive progress was partially due to the government's Zero Hunger program, which included Bolsa Família—a large-scale conditional cash transfer program that contributed to decreased child mortality in Brazil, in part via improved nutrition. In 2009, Brazil met its Millennium Development Goal of reducing poverty and malnutrition by half—several years ahead of the 2015 deadline. However, poor diet quality, overweight, and obesity remain challenges.

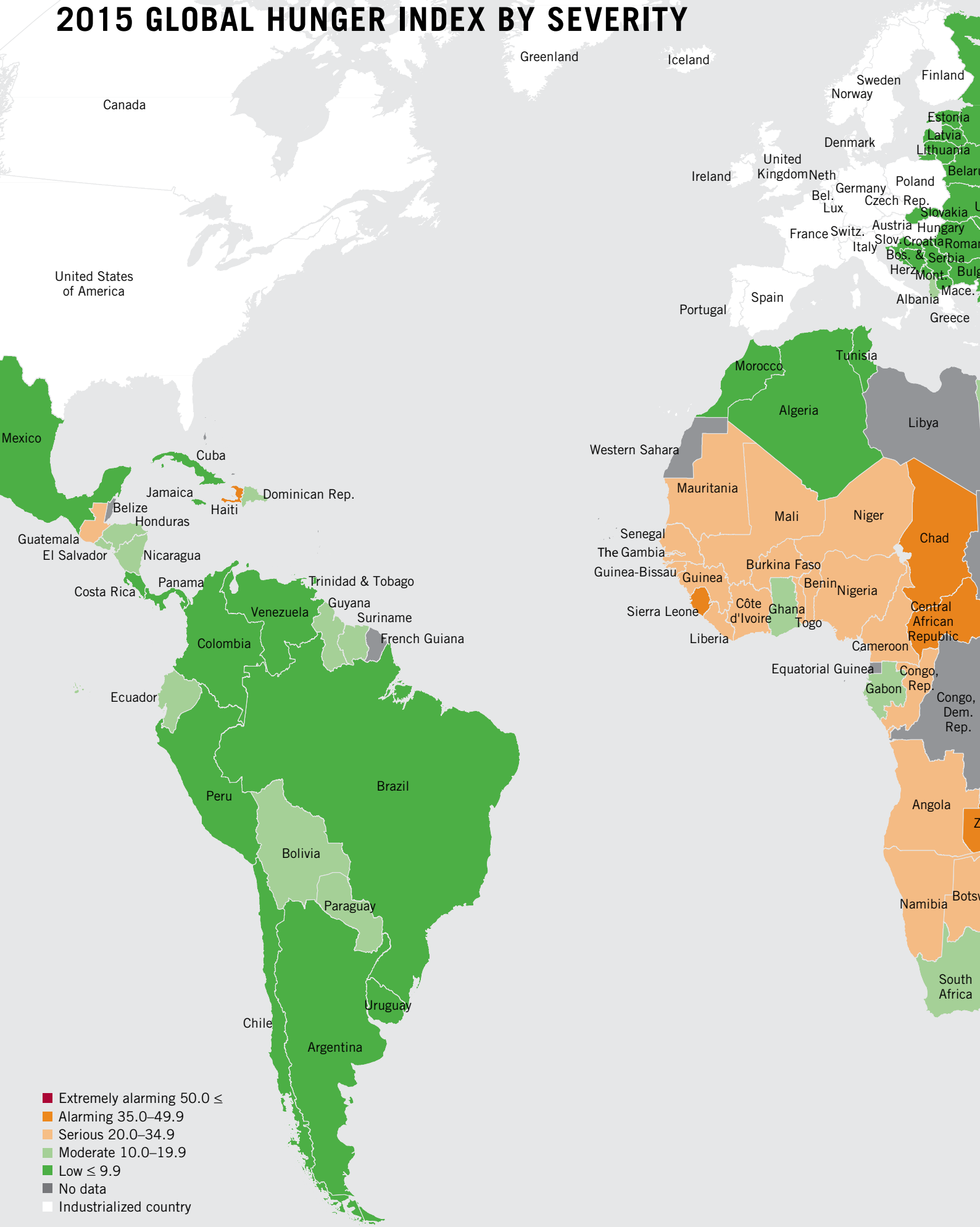
¹ In the 2014 report, a 2014 GHI score could only be calculated for former Sudan as one entity.

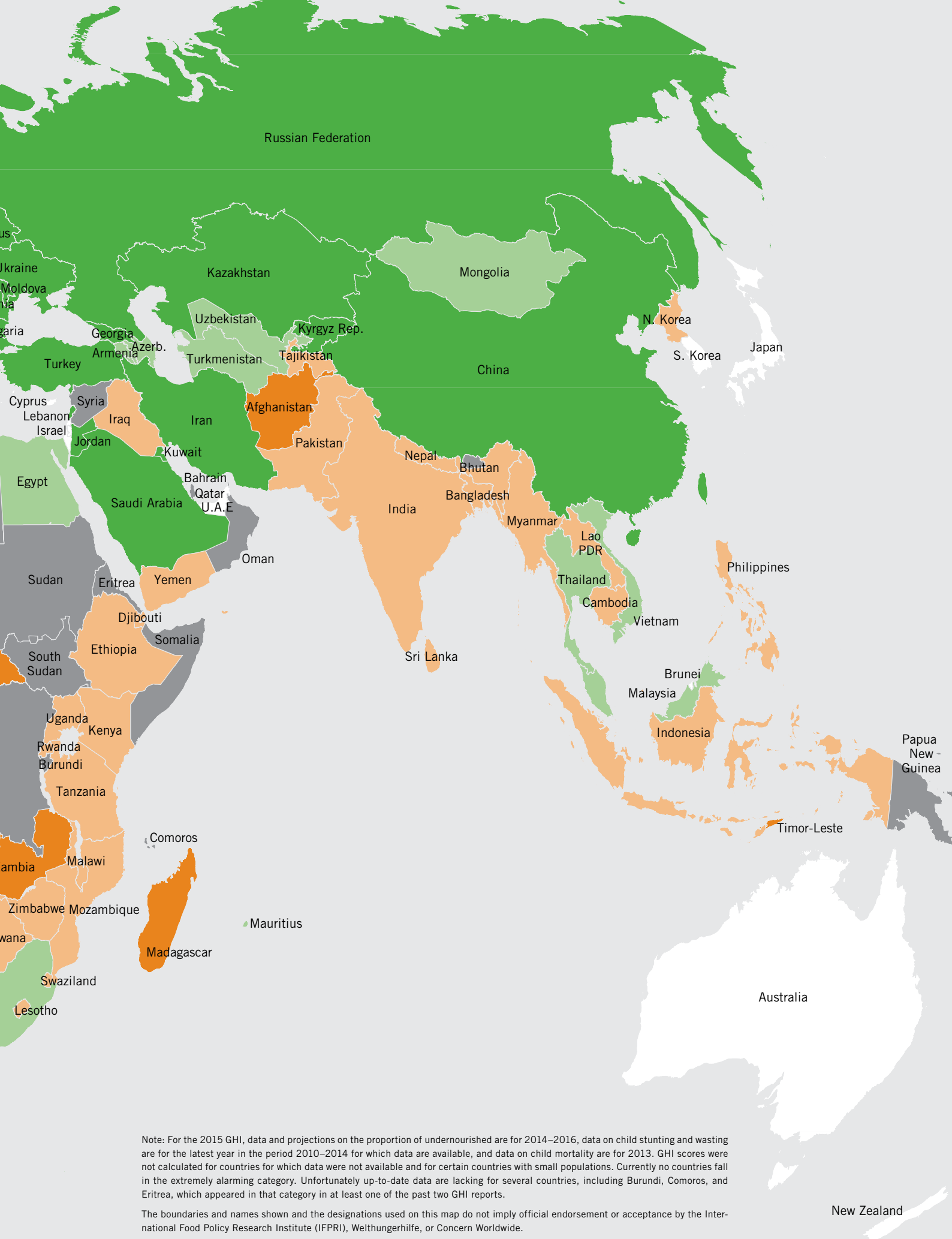
FIGURE 2 DEVELOPING WORLD AND REGIONAL 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, AND 2015 GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX SCORES, WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY COMPONENT



Note: See Appendix A for data sources. www.ifpri.org/ghi/2015. A 1990 regional score for Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States was not calculated, because many countries had different borders.

2015 GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX BY SEVERITY





Note: For the 2015 GHI, data and projections on the proportion of undernourished are for 2014–2016, data on child stunting and wasting are for the latest year in the period 2010–2014 for which data are available, and data on child mortality are for 2013. GHI scores were not calculated for countries for which data were not available and for certain countries with small populations. Currently no countries fall in the extremely alarming category. Unfortunately up-to-date data are lacking for several countries, including Burundi, Comoros, and Eritrea, which appeared in that category in at least one of the past two GHI reports.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Welthungerhilfe, or Concern Worldwide.

Recommended citation: "Figure 2.4: 2015 Global Hunger Index by Severity." Map in *2015 Global Hunger Index: Armed Conflict and the Challenge of Hunger*, by K. von Grebmer, J. Bernstein, A. de Waal, N. Prasai, S. Yin, and Y. Yohannes. 2015. Bonn, Washington, DC, and Dublin: Welthungerhilfe, International Food Policy Research Institute, and Concern Worldwide.

Mongolia also saw a 56 percent drop between its 2000 and 2015 GHI scores. After 2000, Mongolia experienced steady economic growth, with the exception of a brief downturn during the 2008 global financial crisis. The combination of economic growth, driven by rising mining and quarrying revenues, and social welfare programs, including a comprehensive national strategy to tackle undernutrition (UNICEF 2009), coincided with decreased poverty and hunger levels after 2000, as well as reductions in the values of each of the GHI components. However, poverty and undernutrition have persisted in Mongolia's rural areas, particularly for small-scale livestock herders and their families (Mongolia 2013).

Since 2000, Rwanda, Angola, and Ethiopia have seen the biggest reductions in hunger in absolute terms, with GHI scores down by between 25 and 28 points in each country. Despite these improvements, the hunger levels in these countries are still serious. In fact, among the countries for which data were available, Rwanda, Angola, and Ethiopia had the three highest GHI scores in 2000 (58.5, 58.3, and 58.6, respectively), which explains why hunger levels are still high (30.3, 32.6, and 33.9). These countries are also recovering from a legacy of civil war, and although it is not possible to directly attribute their hunger levels to the previous conflicts, they undoubtedly contributed to the challenges these countries face.

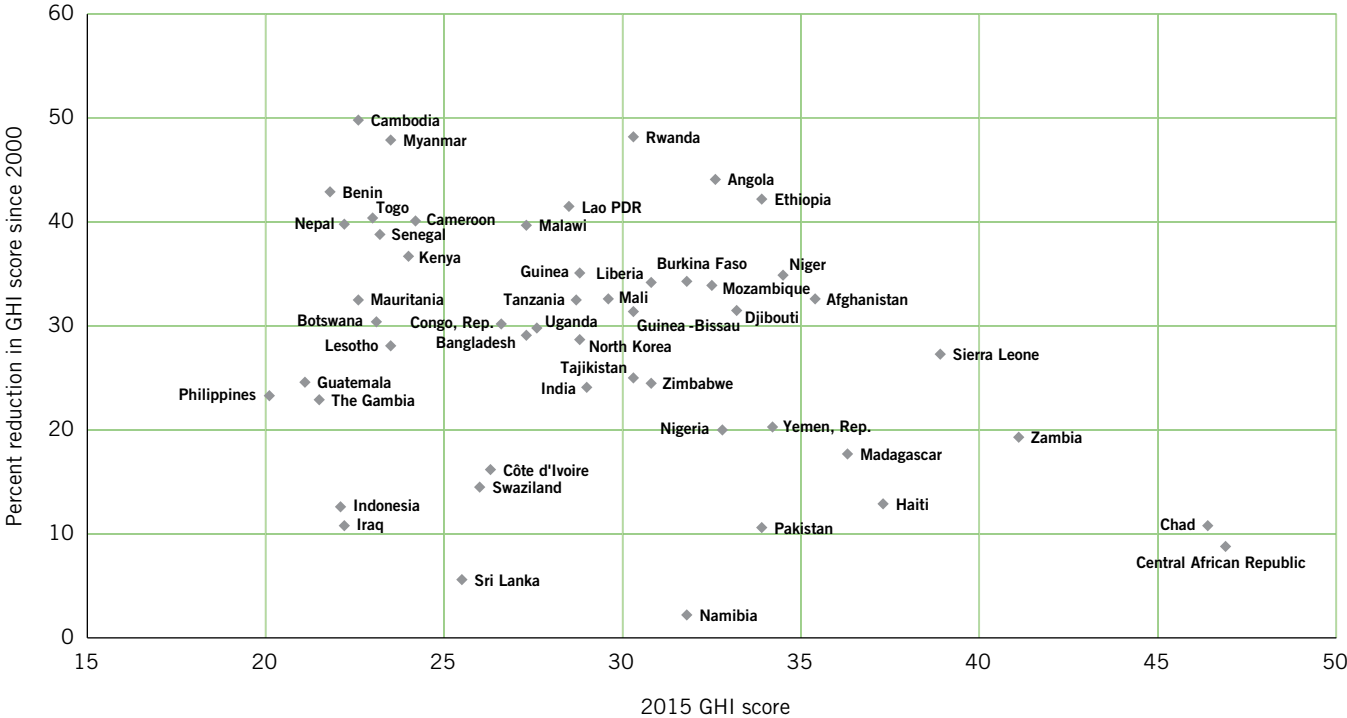
In Rwanda, poverty and hunger spiked after the country's deadly civil war (1990–1993), which culminated in the Rwandan genocide in 1994. However, in the post-war period, Rwanda's government designed policies to promote inclusive economic growth, and the country has experienced increasing Gross Domestic Product levels along with decreasing inequality, particularly since 2005–2006 (UNDP 2015). Rwanda's child mortality rate was down to 5.2 percent as of 2013, and child wasting was 3.0 percent according to a 2010–2011 survey, suggesting that acute malnutrition has waned; however, child stunting was still high, at 44.3 percent.

Bad News

Eight countries still suffer from alarming levels of hunger. The majority of those are in Africa south of the Sahara. The three exceptions are Afghanistan, Haiti, and Timor-Leste.

The three worst-scoring countries in this year's GHI are Central African Republic, Chad, and Zambia (See map). The Central African Republic has been plagued by instability, dictatorships, and repeated coups since its independence from France in 1960. Most recently, beginning in 2013, fighting between disparate groups resulted in sizeable casualties and internal displacement of nearly 20 percent of the population (Arieff 2014).

FIGURE 3 HOW COUNTRIES FARED SINCE 2000



Note: The countries included are those with 2015 Global Hunger Index (GHI) scores equal to or greater than 20, reflecting either serious or alarming hunger levels. This figure features countries where data were available to calculate GHI scores. Some likely poor performers do not appear, due to missing data.

ARMED CONFLICT AND THE CHALLENGE OF FAMINE: IS AN END IN SIGHT?

When famine or acute hunger occurs today, it is usually the result of armed conflict, which disrupts food systems, destroys livelihoods, displaces people, and leaves those who stay unsure when they will eat next. That said, recent observations offer cause for optimism.

End of the Worst Famines

A historic, yet unheralded achievement of the last 50 years is that calamitous famines—those that cause more than 1 million deaths each—seem to have been eliminated. Through much of the 20th century, starvation killed millions of people every decade. More than 15 million people died in each of five separate decades. Until recently, great famines—those that kill more than 100,000 people—were much more common. In the 21st century thus far, the death toll is near 600,000 (Figure 4), which is still cause for concern, yet low by historical standards.

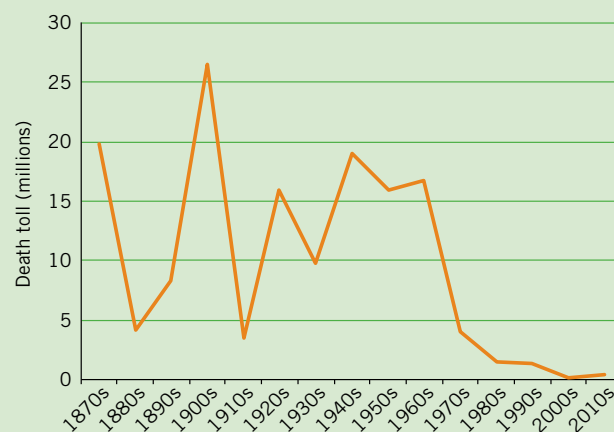
Famines in the 19th and 20th centuries were associated with imperial expansion from the 1870s to World War I, with totalitarian systems whose wartime leaders used starvation as a weapon, and with Communist central planning. Since famine has disappeared from Europe and mostly vanished from Asia, it has lost much of its menace.

Positive Developments

The end of the Cold War, the adoption of international human rights norms, and the rise of globalization are key factors that make it possible to eliminate famine for the first time in history. Unparalleled global prosperity and interconnectedness, the legitimacy of international concerns over domestic violations, and far more information sharing mean people are less likely to starve in silence because others do not know what is going on.

Today's famines are complex humanitarian emergencies, caused mostly by armed conflict and exacerbated by natural disasters or international policies (Keen 2008). These “new wars” (Kaldor 1999) involve not only state armies and insurgents, but also paramilitaries and ethnic militia, criminal gangs, mercenaries, and international forces. Most are civil wars that increasingly spill over borders, disrupt livelihoods and food systems, and force people to flee. They tend to be less lethal than old wars, in terms of levels of violence and hunger (Human Security

FIGURE 4 GLOBAL DEATH TOLL FROM GREAT FAMINES, 1870s–2010s



Note: Each great famine killed more than 100,000 people.
Source: World Peace Foundation (2015).

Report 2013). However, they are often intractable and display persistent, seemingly patternless violence from which no one is safe.

Challenges Ahead

The 21st century has witnessed no calamitous famines so far, but what will it take to end all forms of hunger and undernutrition by 2030? First, we need stronger mechanisms to prevent and resolve conflicts. With wars becoming less frequent and less lethal, the long-term trends related to violent conflict are encouraging (Human Security Report 2013). But the challenges of the day—for example in South Sudan, Syria and Yemen—are formidable. Economic development, better food policy, conflict resolution, and international humanitarian response must all continue to play important roles in reducing hunger and undernutrition. Unless armed conflict can be reduced, and preferably ended, and the needs and rights of both visible and invisible victims of violent conflict can be addressed, the gains will be lost.

**International Food Policy
Research Institute**

2033 K Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006-1002, USA
Tel. +1 202-862-5600
Fax +1 202-467-4439
www.ifpri.org

Deutsche Welthungerhilfe e. V.

Friedrich-Ebert-Straße 1
53173 Bonn, Germany
Tel. +49 228-2288-0
Fax +49 228-2288-333
www.welthungerhilfe.de
Member of Alliance2015

Concern Worldwide

52-55 Lower Camden Street
Dublin 2, Ireland
Tel. +353 1-417-7700
Fax +353 1-475-7362
www.concern.net
Member of Alliance2015

IFPRI: Klaus von Grebmer, Jill Bernstein,
Nilam Prasai, Sandra Yin, Yisehac Yohannes
World Peace Foundation/Tufts University: Alex de Waal
Concern Worldwide: Olive Towey
Welthungerhilfe: Andrea Sonntag, Larissa Neubauer

A Peer-Reviewed Publication

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on the map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) or its partners and contributors. Photo credit: Panos/S. Torfinn, 2003.

Copyright © 2015 International Food Policy Research Institute. All rights reserved. Contact ifpri-copyright@cgiar.org for permission to reprint. ISBN: 978-0-89629-876-7

For full references, see the full report at www.ifpri.org/ghi/2015.

